

# **Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Bob Papp's Remarks**

**At the**

## **Memorial Service for the Crew of the CG 6535**

Coast Guard Aviation Training Center

Mobile, AL

Thursday, March 8, 2012

Good Morning Shipmates,

Ladies and Gentleman, members of the Coast Guard family, Active Duty, Reserve, Civilian, Auxiliary, members of our extended Coast Guard Family who are with us here today.

I know the last two weeks have been a bit of an emotional high and low for all of us, it's like being on a roller coaster.

Last week on Tuesday evening Linda and I were entertaining some of my fellow Service Chiefs in our quarters. We had a wonderful dinner. Three members of the Coast Guard Band were there to entertain us after dinner. In fact Petty Officer Megan Weikleenget who's our vocalist today was one of those three. And I had asked her to sing a song which is a favorite of mine, it's called American Anthem. Because it's a song of selfless service and sacrifice that I always find very appropriate for members who serve their country. So after the guests and the band had departed, I was walking around the quarters and the song was still in my mind. I was humming it to myself and the final chorus which I've always loved, which is "let me know in my heart, when my days are through, America, America, I gave my best to you."

Then the phone rang. It's the type of phone call that the Commandant doesn't like to get. And of course it was the call to inform me that Coast Guard 6535 had gone down in Mobile Bay.

And that song has been with me every since, in my mind, etched in my mind and I can't stop thinking about it, because for the crewmembers of 6535, we know in our hearts at the end of their day, America, America they gave their best to you.

So Linda and I join you today and our entire Coast Guard family in mourning this tragic loss.

For the families of our lost aircrews – We really cannot truly know the depth of your sorrow.

But, what we can do is to be here with you. To Stand beside you. And, let you know that you are not alone – that you are part of a larger Coast Guard family. And, we are here for you Today. Tomorrow. And, for the remainder of your days. We have no duty that's more important.

But, we also have another obligation. All of us share in the sacred duty to observe and practice the manners of our profession. You won't find these manners written up in any book, or any document, or any Coast Guard publication. These manners are observed, they're taught and they're experienced. They're felt in the heart. And, they are from the heart. Today, it's our duty to observe the manners of our profession as we memorialize the crew of the Coast Guard helicopter 6535:

LCDR Dale Taylor, LTJG Thomas John Cameron,  
Chief Petty Officer Fernando Jorge, and,  
Petty Officer Third Class Andrew Knight.  
We'll never forget them –

I want to thank Deputy Secretary Lute behind me here on the stage, who's here to represent the Department of Homeland Security, Our Secretary, Janet Napolitano and all of the President's Executive Branch;  
I want to thank Congressman Jo Bonner who's here today representing the legislative branch of our government;  
Mayor Jones other Distinguished Guests,  
Rear Admiral Baumgartner;  
Rear Admiral Nash;  
Admiral Callahan;  
Admiral Mehling,  
Shipmates and Friends,

And there is one person here who's absence is large, that's Vice Adm. John Currier the senior Aviator of the United States Coast Guard and our Ancient Albatross. He stayed behind in Washington to fill in for me to help out with some activities we have going back there. He would have loved to be here with you today, but we're sending him down here tomorrow, he'll be here to talk to the crew.

To the Leaders of Alabama and the City of Mobile – I know you also share in our loss. Your caring, your understanding, and your support shows that Mobile is truly a dedicated Coast Guard city – it also shows that Alabama cares for its Coast Guard men and women.

We see it in your first responders, who immediately joined our search—and continued to work tirelessly— as if they were searching for their own. Because, they felt it was their own.

We feel it from your vigils and your prayers. They comforted us. They Lifted us - and, in our darkest hours, joined us together . . . when everything we knew was breaking apart.

And, we know it from your presence here today as you stand with us –beside our families – and giving your continued support to our Coast Guard.

To The Coast Guard Foundation: Thank you, once again, for rescuing the rescuers. Thank you for being our lifeline. And, most of all, thank you for your support to the families of 6535.

To all the assembled, by your attendance here today, on this solemn occasion, you demonstrate your care, compassion and support for our families. We can't thank you enough.

Like all our other lost aviators, rescue swimmers, air crewman and Coast Guardsmen, LCDR Taylor, LTJG Cameron, Chief Jorge, and, Petty Officer Knight, were performing their duties, expanding their knowledge base, and honing their skills -- all that they would be true to our motto – Semper Paratus – Always Ready.

And for Dale, Tom, Nando and Drew, they did answer the call. They stepped forward, and dedicated their lives to helping others -- the only thing stronger than their desire to fly, was their desire to serve. And, they did serve – they served all of us.

So I'd like to speak directly to the families this morning

And, I want to start off by talking to the boys –  
Evan and Emmett . . .

Guys, I know you're probably not going to remember a lot about this day years from now but I'm going to give you a written copy of this, because I want you to hear and read again what I say about your Dad . . . one of the hardest things I've ever had to explain to children, my children included, is why their Dad or their Mom would possibly take a job that takes them away from their kids and puts them out in dangerous situations.

The Dads and the Moms love them so much, but they have a very important job to do. And it's difficult. We love going to sea, we love flying, we get excited about doing it, but as soon as we take in the lines and get underway, or as soon as we go down the runway and take off into the air, the first thing we start thinking about is how soon we can get back to our kids and our families. So Evan and Emmet, I am confident that your dad, as he was starting up the helicopter on Tuesday evening, part of his checklist was looking forward to getting back home and seeing you.

And there is something else I want to tell you, your Dad was very, very special. His job was to help other people, and he was one of our very, very best. He used his special skills and he risked his life many times so that he could help others. He was the type of man that people look up to. And as you grow up, you're going to hear many times people talk about your Daddy saying what a hero he was, and we can only hope that as you grow up you'll turn into men just like your Dad.

And to the spouses, to the parents, to the families and friends . . . I know it's hard to make sense of why your sons, husbands, fathers, brothers, cousins and loved ones were lost in this accident, or to come up with a reason why. I wish I could give you a reason. I can't. But what I can say is that you, we, can be inspired by their legacy of service, to country to community and to family. Their service can be our source of consolation.

These things, they did so that others might live and in doing so they gave the ultimate sacrifice. Their spirit will always be with us, we will never forget them.

I'd like to talk to the Aviation Community in the Coast Guard as well...

Just about two years ago, just after I assumed my watch as Commandant, we assembled in a hangar very similar to this one in Sitka, Alaska. We were there to remember 3 lost crewmembers from the Coast Guard helicopter 6017.

Several months before that, there was a similar event in Sacramento, California to mourn the 7 crewmembers of a Coast Guard C-130 1705; and a year before that, it was a hangar in Hawaii to honor the loss of 4 crewmembers from Coast Guard helicopter 6505.

Counting our crew today that we rightly honor, that brings us to 18 lost members of our aviation community in a period of about 4 years. It's unprecedented.

Now, I'm a sailor as you all know, I'm not an aviator. But, it doesn't matter – because we're all Coast Guardsmen. We're a small service. And, all of us share in every loss. Like many of you here today, I've also experienced the loss and pain of a death in my crew first hand.

Several years ago, when I was a Commanding Officer of EAGLE, we were off San Juan, Puerto Rico. It was a beautiful day at sea. The type that we all look forward to. But tragedy struck. A young member of my crew, a seaman, fell from the rigging, and was killed instantly.

I was stunned. My crew was in shock. And, in the immediate aftermath, some of the crew members were a little unsure of themselves – others were afraid to climb back up in the rigging.

More broadly, I could hear the whispers behind my back, and the whispers that I've heard for many years, "perhaps we out to do away with Tall Ship training." Because it was too dangerous – and too risky – they said there were safer ways to train and prepare cadets for a life of sea duty.

But, they were wrong then – and, if you hear similar whispers today about flying, they are wrong now.

There is no substitute for training at sea – whether it's on or over the water. Because, when the storm clouds form, and others head for safe harbor, that's when we have to be ready to head out. And if we're going to perform these challenging maritime missions – and we are –we must continue to train in the same conditions that we operate.

We've performed these missions for over two centuries and we've flown for nearly a century. It's what YOU do every day – it's vital to the safety and security of our homeland – our maritime – and our Nation.

America is counting on YOU to perform them – and so am I.

We will continue to climb into the rigging – because it's what we need to do to set sail.

And, we will continue to launch, even, when required, into harm's way, because that's where we need to go to search for and to save others.

And, just as the crew of 6535 was doing last Tuesday night, we will continue to train, whether in the light of day, or the dark of night, because we're Coast Guardsmen. This is our chosen profession. This is our way. This is what we do.

*Semper Paratus.*